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AUTHOR Bentley, Nancy M.
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ABSTRACT

Focusing on critics' analyses as well as the author's literary techniques, this annotated bibliography is designed to aid teachers in presenting an in-depth study of John Knowles' "A Separate Peace." Critical annotations are provided for three categories of citations: (1) English-language literary journal articles (17 annotations); (2) abstracts of doctoral dissertations (2 annotations); and (3) sections of books focusing on various aspects of Knowles' novel (3 annotations). (MM)

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Nancy Bentley
English Department
San Diego State University
October 28, 1988

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A Separate Peace by John Knowles

An Annotated Bibliography

John Knowles, a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and a recipient of both the Rosenthal Award and the William Faulkner Foundation Award for his initial book, A Separate Peace (Commire 8: 101), tells the story of two students during a 1942 summer session at Devon School in New Hampshire. Despite the idyllic pastoral setting of the school, in this 1959 novel, the author has presented a clear picture of boys' dealing with the obstacles encountered in the passage from youth to maturity. Such struggles for self-knowledge engender pain and ultimately cause the death of one of the students. Knowles has made it apparent that battles are not fought easily, not those of the accelerating World War II, nor the ones that occur between friends. Moreover, each boy wrestles hard with the devils within himself in an attempt to come to terms with his personal world.

Since John Knowles, a graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy

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(Commire 8: 102), the Devon School of the story, wrote this novel more than 25 years ago, it has proved to be a favorite not only among adults but also with students and their teachers. Few subjects are more appealing to young people than the problems encountered in the attainment of personal understanding during the struggle to adulthood. Thus, since 1959, this slim volume has been the subject of analysis by literary critics.

This bibliography, focusing on critics' analyses of Knowles's themes as well as of his literary techniques, has been designed to aid the educator who desires to involve a class in an in-depth study of A Separate Peace. The theme of a novel is a prominent idea of a literary work and is expressed as a general observation on life. In order to formulate such a concept, it is necessary to understand all of the components of the novel, thus to go beyond the unraveling of the plot line, and to deal with those elements used to create the theme or even themes. Included among these factors are character development, interplay between people, setting, imagery, point of view, and tone. In addition, each critic in an appraisal of the story assumes a different approach. Nevertheless, each of the sources annotated deals with an aspect of Knowles's craftsmanship and, in the process, proposes or implies a theme inherent in the work. The critical annotations are of three categories: English-language literary journal articles, abstracts of doctoral dissertations, and sections of books focusing on aspects of Knowles's novel. The time span of these

publications is from 1963 to 1984.

Journal Articles

Crabbe, John K. "On the Playing Fields of Devon." English Journal Feb. 1963: 109-11. "Although deceptively simple in its style ... closer scrutiny, however, reveals a treatment of American innocence in the tradition of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Salinger," whose characters provide comparisons for those of Knowles. Finny, guileless, becomes the victim of Gene, rife with insecurity and hostility. Each boy "represents a problem in adolescent development ... security, isolation, inferiority."

Ellis, James. "A Separate Peace: The Fall from Innocence." English Journal May 1964: 313-18. "A realization of an uglier adult world" is the theme that Ellis finds prominent in Knowles's novel. Such an underlying idea, synonymous with "moving from innocence to adulthood," is achieved by the use of symbols found in the story. Finny, representing "the pure spirit of man," is contrary to Gene, who eventually "discovers his own savagery." The incompatability of the boys becomes paramount, and Knowles makes use of symbols such as the rivers to demonstrate their contrasting attributes. Finney, a static character, represents illusion. Not until this misimpression has been shattered and Phineas dies is Gene able to see the adult world as it truly is, "that hatred springs from a

greater evil that is within." At last he is able to come to terms with the world beyond Devon School.

Ely, Sister M. Amanda. "The Adult Image in Three Novels of Adolescent Life." English Journal Nov. 1967: 1127-31. By utilizing three novels, the author examines adult images commonly known to high schoolers, including parents, schoolmasters, and even doctors and nurses. Because the boys find the adults in A Separate Peace "out of touch," they turn to their peers for help in the quest for maturity. "No adult in the book is a suitable model for a teen." The other novels, Lord of the Flies and The Catcher in the Rye, provide good bases for comparison and contrast with Knowles's book in the study of adult images. Certainly, "the three novels seem to state that communication and real understanding between the generations are not easily achieved."

Foster, Milton P. "Levels of Meaning in A Separate Peace." The English Record Apr. 1968: 34-40. Foster stresses that Knowles's novel is an excellent tool for teaching that a unifying idea "is developed through many levels of meaning." Beneath the surface is "hate that results from fear ... [while] another aspect concerns "sin and forgiveness." Moreover, Knowles develops each of these essences in both a literal and symbolic way, at the same time delving into the nature of guilt. An additional consideration is the "predicament of a good man in a corrupt world," epitomized

by Finny. Probing even further, the critic finds that "it is also a novel about war and peace. The war is the macrocosm of A Separate Peace," while the boys constitute the microcosm. Of paramount importance though is "the struggle for self-knowledge and maturity ... the deepest and most important level of meaning." Thus, like Conrad's The Secret Sharer and The Heart of Darkness, the narrating character is the protagonist; it is he who grows in maturity. Beyond its various strata of meaning, "the novel also possesses the necessary quality of unity," carefully demonstrated in the characters, action, and "overlapping of ideas," as well as by the weaving of all of the implications and connotations.

Greiling, Franziska Lynne. "The Theme of Freedom in A Separate Peace." English Journal Dec. 1967: 1269-72. Greiling sets forth "the implications of certain Greek ideas" in connection with the novel: freedom as well as "arete, the fulfillment of his [an individual's] own excellences." Finny functions as a contrast between Greek and Christian ideals. As representative of the former, he demonstrates that "he respects the individual, not inviolable rules." Thus, he is able to achieve freedom beyond the restrictions which he denies in the same manner in which he negates the war and evil. Knowles uses Greek ideas of "arete and unity" to effect his theme of struggle for freedom. Moreover, he emphasizes the flaw in Finny who, because he does not pursue "intellectual excellence," is

unable to attain the freedom to "know thyself." Conversely, Gene the scholar, unable to live without rules, does eventually achieve self-knowledge. It is Gene who more completely "embodies the Greek ideal"; he has "recognized his ignorance of his own [evil] nature," thus creating a complete self.

Halio, Jay L. "John Knowles's Short Novels." Studies in Short Fiction Winter. 1964: 107-12. The premise of the article is that man must come to terms with himself before he can meld with society. Also before such a union can take place, specifically before Gene is able to enter the war beyond Devon, he must shed "the fear which lies behind destructive hatred." Halio feels that Gene's ridding himself of this fear, along with the hatred and the desire "to kill," is the focus of the novel. Therefore, Gene must attain freedom from the fright which acts as a mask and thus prevents him from coming to terms with himself. Phineas, even through his death, is the means by which Gene achieves this status.

Kennedy, Ian. "Dual Perspective Narrative and the Character of Phineas in A Separate Peace." Studies in Short Fiction Fall 1974: 353-359. Kennedy proposes that Knowles's technique of presenting a twofold image of Gene is a successful method of "dissolving the limitations of conventional first-person narration." Generally the boy is the narrator, while the adult interprets. Moreover, Phineas assumes the role of alter ego for Gene. While

Gene's life is woven of tangled threads, Phineas is an "integrated personality." Therefore, Finny is developed as a dynamic character, possessing all of the positive, comforting attributes which Gene feels himself missing. Indeed, perhaps it is Finny, with his magnanimous view of life, who is "gunned down" by realism. A thoughtful analysis of Finny from the "dual perspective" of Gene accentuates that although Gene is a boy who possesses the "immediacy of the experiences," it is the thirty-two year-old Gene who, even in retrospect, demonstrates understanding and humility.

McDonald, James J. "The Novels of John Knowles." Arizona Quarterly Win. 1967: 335-42. Although the article discusses "the overall achievement of John Knowles," the author sets forth the premise that like the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Henry James, Knowles "is writing what has been termed the novel of manners." In A Separate Peace, the prominent issues are "the Second World War and its moral effect on American society." The minds and actions of schoolboys are the vehicles by which such "cultural upheaval" is shown. In addition, McDonald feels that the effect of James is strong here concerning point of view. "There is, then, a discrepancy between [Gene's] judgements and the actions and attitudes he is judging." Like James, Knowles is using the narrative as a complex encounter between the narrator and the reader, who is able to participate in the former's past.

McDonald, Walter R. "Heroes Never Learn: Irony in A Separate Peace." Iowa English Bulletin Yearbook 22 (1972): 33-36. McDonald proposes that in Knowles's novel, irony is "the controlling technique ... in terms of characterization, development of episode, and theme." Although the author explains the irony inherent in the interplay between the characters, they, "the weakest and best" are roommates. But more important are subtle issues in the story involving "significant questions about human evil." Gene is the unconscious possessor of malice, while Finny is his hero, the example of innocence, but "an innocence that must be broken." Unfortunately, this does not happen, and so Finny does not survive. Conversely, Gene remains as he is, able to accommodate to the evil in the world "by bending with the truth." But perhaps the greatest irony of all is that Gene must cause the death of Finny, who epitomizes blindness to self-knowledge and reality, in order to begin to face the truth both about himself and the world. Moreover, although Finny's naivete about "man's ambivalence" leads to his downfall, Gene, essentially "blind to his own conscience," survives in order to "render more evil."

Mellard, James M. "Counterpoint and 'Double Vision' in A Separate Peace." Studies in Short Fiction Win. 1967: 127-34. The article focuses on the counterpoint or the multiple contrasts in the novel, achieved through theme, point of view, symbolism, characterization, plot, and

structure. Fundamental is the "counterpoint between war and peace, reality and illusion." The two rivers, the seasons, settings, and character relationships point up the antitheses inherent in the work. Finny, through his "relative values," reveals "double vision" in contrast to Gene, who for a time is pinioned by the rigid dictates of his own mind. Ultimately, Mellard shows that through the process of contrast, Gene achieves the ability to measure everything against the "prelapsarian summer of 1942." Thus, despite his act against Finny, Gene continues to measure himself against the youth, eventually equipping himself to deal with the war beyond Devon.

Mengeling, Marvin E. "A Separate Peace: Meaning and Myth." English Journal Dec. 1969: 1322-29. Clearly this article presents the necessity for man to strive "toward that farthest frontier." To illustrate this American passion for the untenable, Mengeling focuses on "the subtle interaction of two chief levels of significance: the literal and the mythic," defining "mythic" as "an imaginative narrative in which one or more of the major characters are representative of gods or god-like personages, engaged in symbolic actions amid symbolic objects..." (Arvin 181-82). Finny, representing the young Greek god, experiences a symbolic and physical fall from the tree which is the "central action of the book," a fall that is "Gene's 'fortunate fall' from ignorance." At this point, the story become mythic, "a tale of understanding

and love," in which Gene incorporates some of Finny's loving spirit unto himself. Finny becomes Gene's messiah, helping him to size "up the world" in a way that will cause a minimum of catastrophe. The article emphasizes that Finny represents more than a boy for it is through him that Knowles presents "a quest for the ideals of the Golden Age of Greece." He is "Phoebus Apollo," one who can banish fear and reveal a world akin to glorious Greece, with Gene's eventually becoming "Phineas-filled" with "friendship, loyalty, and love." Therefore the author indicates that in order to bring peace and order to our bloodied world, the spirit of mythic Apollo, that of idealism, must speak through literal man.

Slethaug, Gordon E. "The Play of the Double in A Separate Peace." Canadian Review of American Studies Fall 1984: 259-270. The author bases his article on an idea formulated by Johan Huizinga in Homo Ludens in which "play, agon, is present in a broad range of cultural activities...". Roger Caillois and Jacques Ehrmann add to Huizinga's competitive aspect of play another component, "paidia, spontaneous play". Thus, "through the device of the double," Knowles presents two contrasting views of the "game of life": Gene's "agon," all for domination; and Finny's "paidia", play simply for enjoyment. The author asserts that Knowles proposes both views of "the double," represented by the two youths, as ways of coping with people and their environment.

Concomitantly, Knowles accents the bifurcated symbol with the contrasting rivers, seasons, exterior and interior styles of architecture of the school, and even the North and South, respective homes of Gene and Finny. Gene's argonic perception pervades all that he does; he is forever fighting the "game of life." Eventually in retrospect, Gene realizes that by joining Finny's love of play to his own competitive spirit, he is able to discover a peace, albeit a separate one.

Travis, Mildred K. "Mirror Images in A Separate Peace and Cat and Mouse." Notes on Contemporary Literature Spring 1975: 12-15. Gunter Grass's novelle Cat and Mouse is utilized here as a mirror image of Knowles's novel. By using setting, delineation of character, action, and finally the fate of the leader in each book as he "becomes the victim of his best friend's ambiguous but effective ineptness," the article is able to demonstrate that Grass has skillfully reflected the story of Gene and Finny. Nevertheless, the author emphasizes that the actions of the characters do diverge, supplying added interest to the study, including elevating "the theme of misjudgement."

Ward, Hayden. "The Arnc dian Situation in A Separate Peace." Bulletin of the West Virginia Association of College English Teachers 1: (1974) 2-10. Ward asserts that Knowles's presentation of the "initiation theme" is complex, "both morally and psychologically." Finny survives as a mythic god "whose gift of himself [his

altruism] nourishes ... Gene [and] the Devon world." Thus, Ward carefully analyzes the power of love to transcend grief, found both in the novel as well as in the poems of Matthew Arnold. In addition, Ward cites the "gypsy image" of the summer session, seemingly free of rules with little intrusion of the war outside. Finny, like Arnold's "The Scholar-Gipsy," is the "perpetual youth," exerting a liberating influence upon his peer group. But Knowles, however, unlike Arnold, does not seem to view the world as possessing negative qualities that are irreversible; instead, to the former, all is retrievable. Therefore Finny, of symbolic goodness, lives on, assimilated into Gene's character. It is in this manner that Knowles projects his "faith in the possibilities of civilization"; if Finny is the power for hope and goodness, then Gene becomes their purveyor.

Weber, Ronald . "Narrative Method in A Separate Peace." Studies in Short Fiction Fall 1965: 63-72. Specifically discussing Knowles's narrative method in developing the theme, the article's author employs Salinger's Catcher in the Rye to demonstrate the effectiveness of A Separate Peace. Although both novels implement a first-person narrator, only Knowles effectively makes use of the principle of distance created by time. By utilizing this means, Weber asserts that understanding requires a measure of distance. Thus, he is able to establish a detachment which culminates both in a clear understanding of himself

as well as of those painful past experiences. Knowles uses a series of dramatic incidents narrated in first person, past and present, to illustrate "the fact of evil in the world," whose "only escape ... is self-awareness."

Witherington, Paul. " A Separate Peace: A Study in Structural Ambiguity." English Journal Dec. 1965: 795-800. Although "the development and resolution of tensions between Gene and Finny provide the well-balanced structure of A Separate Peace, ... an ambiguity [is] expressed in both character and symbol." Knowles implies that innocence and evil cannot be clearly delineated. Dual significance is also present in Knowles's images: the river, the tree, and finally, the stairs. "Finally, love and hate are themselves ambiguous in A Separate Peace; ... Gene is never sure what Finny represents ... a friend, a fraud, or a neurotic." In addition, both boys grapple with the problem of trying to control reality, to see the world as pure goodness in order to shut out the war. Gene, however, finds this impossible but instead discovers that he is able to distinguish "the idealist from the realist," or "what the world should be and what it really is."

Wolfe, Peter. "The Impact of Knowles's A Separate Peace." University Review [The Curators of the University of Missouri] Mar. 1970: 189-98. Wolfe states that Knowles feels "that the condition of life is war." To Knowles, "man can only know himself through action ...; [such action] always involves treachery and physical risk." In

A Separate Peace, the boys act out this barbarianism. In fact, Gene displays "his moral ambiguity," accepting but not exploiting it. The article emphasizes the "primitive madness" inherent in the youth, and presents the tree as a metaphor, standing "for reality itself." Also Wolfe finds Phineas placed in opposition to Gene, the former representing "the harmony and interrelatedness of his life." As a result, the two cannot coexist for man is malevolent, a creature "of aboriginal madness." The theme is supported by the structure which Wolfe finds to be a series of "tensions, stresses, and balances." Moreover, he finds that the book demonstrates that man's inherent evil has encompassed all, and that ironically, Gene is unable to achieve a true peace, a peace separate from the world, for he has not expunged the beast within himself.

Abstracts of Doctoral Dissertations

Gregory, Thomas West. "Friendships Between Adolescent Males in Selected American Novels from 1945 to 1970." DAI 33 (1972): 6910A. University of Iowa. The author examines A Separate Peace along with four other American novels written since 1945. Each story presents a "single relationship ... between two adolescent males involved in the process of attaining adulthood." Rituals of the process as well as initiation into maturity are the foci of the passage. Each protagonist "searches for identity" and so in each situation, dominance shifts as each youth

realizes that he is lacking in either body or mind. As a result, [as in Knowles's novel] "the friendship develops into a power struggle." Moreover, not until a boy liberates himself from the battle is he able "to define his identity."

Nelson, Robert McDowell. "Some Instances of Double Vision in Post-War American Fiction: Essays on Knowles, Hawkes, and Barth." DAI 36 (1975): 2826A. Stanford University. Nelson attempts to show through A Separate Peace that its "form ... is designed to express the complimentary but antithetical main elements of [Knowles's] double vision." Therefore, Gene finds his dual identity through his companions and surroundings at Devon School. By eventually being able to incorporate those elements around him, for example, the altruism of Finny, Gene finally establishes a oneness within himself. Nelson feels that Gene's ridding himself of his internal war is both a reflection of Knowles's "best dream of self-recreation and his worst of self-annihilation."

Sections Within Books

Hipkiss, Robert A. "The New Romanticism." Jack Kerouac, Prophet of the New Romanticism: A Critical Study of the Published Works of Kerouac and a Comparison of Them to Those of J. D. Salinger, James Purdy, John Knowles, and Ken Kesey. Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1976. 95-129. In this section of his book, the author discusses

a "new romanticism" present in our country since World War II (95). Youth has refused the legacy of responsibility bequeathed to it by adult middle class and instead "of institutions, they [young people] look to the self" (95). To support his point, Hipkiss examines and compares four authors among whom is John Knowles. The other novelists include Kesey, Purdy, and Salinger. In A Separate Peace, the focus is a "child's innocent vision" (112). Finny believes that in sports all players are victors. Naively he feels that this belief extends to World War II. Moreover, Knowles proposes that the competitive spirit of our society, extending itself to war, nullifies all that is good. "Phineas, [however], is an emblem of courage and love" (114). Thus, because such qualities do not survive in our society, Phineas does not endure. Nevertheless, representative of society's rivalry, Gene, through Finny's death, learns to "control the fear and hostility that corrupt men's potential for love and goodness" (114). Knowles senses that the concern for self must be tempered; in other words, Gene must learn from Finny.

Sarotte, Georges-Michel. "Four Archetypes of the Homosexual Couple." Like a Brother, Like a Lover: Male Homosexuality in the American Novel and Theater from Herman Melville to James Baldwin. Trans. Richard Miller. Garden City: Anchor, 1978. 37-104. Sarotte feels that because of the "totally masculine universe of Devon School, their [Gene and Finny's] friendship changes into hatred out of fear of

its changing into love" (45). As a result, Gene must destroy Finny to avoid identifying with him; Gene is unable to conform to Finny, his "virile ideal" (45). The author presents the view that even though Gene has rejected and eventually destroyed Finny, he has assumed the latter's presence within himself, thus the basis for "a powerful neurosis" (46). All of this is contained within a section entitled "Adolescents," which focuses on youths and their potentially homosexual relationships with their peers. Such discussion is achieved by the use of various novels, including those by Baldwin, Capote, Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Maxwell, McCullers, Melville, and others. Gene's rejection of Finny is just one method, and Sarotte feels not a good one, of dealing with "intense friendship" (44).

Umphlett, Wiley Lee. "The Neo-Romantic Encounter." The Sporting Myth and the American Experience: Studies in Contemporary Fiction. Cranbury: Associated UPs, 1975. 128-168. Umphlett suggests that today's "fictional heroes of contemporary literature ... are denied the freedom to express themselves naturally in the truly romantic sense of individual achievement" (128). He applies this statement to Knowles's Finny with whom he compares a character in Harris's Bang the Drum Slowly. Because Finny dies young, however, he is able to retain his innocent view of the world until the end. He is the "incarnation of the sporting hero before the fall" (135). In addition,

Knowles seems to have used the lesser wars among the boys to demonstrate the inevitability of wars, namely World War II. Thus, such wars result from "something ignorant in the human heart" (Knowles 23). In the novel, "the major conflict exists between the ivory tower and the playing field, or authority and self-expression" (132). Through the use of specific events and symbols, Knowles is able to implement his theme that Finny and Gene represent disparate views of the world, and that Finny's concept of cosmic pureness cannot survive. All the same, Gene, with a more realistic vision of himself and the world, builds his defenses to insure his own survival.

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